

Working Notes

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF JUNE 16, 2014**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the June 16, 2014 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Elevator Conference Room, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Frank Szeps and Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent). Also present were: Various Seniors of R.H. (Rich Laria, Barbara Josephs, Marlene O'Leary, Toni Palazzolo, Melodie Perretto and Marilyn Swepson).

Those absent: Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anyone in the audience who wished to make a comment. No one in the audience wished to do this.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES & WORKING NOTES – MAY'S MEETING

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to approve the Minutes of the May 19, 2014 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to approve the Working Notes of the May 19, 2014 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

4. DISCUSSION TO REVIEW "DRAFT" ROCKY HILL SENIOR SURVEY

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this was the only item on their agenda this evening. She mentioned that she didn't want to lose the momentum from their Committee's last meeting. They have been talking about the Rocky Hill Senior Survey since this Committee had started in November 2013 or December 2013. She said that Denise Sanderson and the Senior Task Force got together to come up with the first draft of this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she has some thoughts about this and Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Staff) had also provided her thoughts to her, as well as to Denise Sanderson.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Joe Kochanek and Councilor Frank Szeps what their thoughts were about this. Councilor Joe Kochanek said he had looked at this draft and it wasn't

bad but he said they probably should look at some other things to put in this too, such as what the seniors are finding wrong with the Senior Center in Town. They could ask the seniors what they don't like about the Senior Center and what they would like to see changed socially or physically.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said surveys are easier if people can answer "yes" or "no" on them. She referred to what Councilor Joe Kochanek had said. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that she would hate to leave this broad-based and she explained some more. She doesn't think they have to get involved in a level of detail with regards to the seniors not liking the Senior Center because the walls are blue for example. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas then asked the Councilors if they had any thoughts as to what kind of questions should be put in this. Councilor Joe Kochanek said if they are trying to compile these things and if they have a section in the survey about what it is that seniors dislike about the Senior Center now then they could put a bunch of categories in (i.e. social and physical). If there is anything that is really wrong with the way that the people perceive the Senior Center then there will be a lot of common answers. He explained some more.

Toni Palazzolo said she is a member of the Senior Task Force. She would prefer to have questions asked in the survey as to what improvements they would make to the current Senior Center instead of what is wrong with it. She told Councilor Joe Kochanek that she knew what he was trying to say but she thinks this should be written down in the positive and not the negative. Councilor Joe Kochanek thinks this is basically what they are trying to get at.

Councilor Frank Szeps said he didn't know if he would support what Toni Palazzolo had just mentioned and if he would put that type of sentence in the survey. Councilor Frank Szeps referred to the draft and he said that he didn't have any problem with the question stated in it as to whether people are familiar with the *Rocky Hill Pivotal Press*. He said that he is assuming this is a publication. Toni Palazzolo said they are trying to cause awareness about that and that is why it is being stated in the survey. Denise Sanderson said that is a monthly newsletter. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that Lisa Zerio had a comment about also listing the Town brochure because this also affects the senior programming. Councilor Frank Szeps said he likes that question because people are just being asked "yes" or "no".

Melodie Perretto said the Town brochure comes out four times per year. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that is going to be cut back. Melodie Perretto said that she heard someone say this will be cut back completely and it will just be online. She asked if this is just talk or if this will be "coming down the pike". Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this will be cut back to at least two brochures per year. Melodie Perretto said thank you.

Councilor Frank Szeps thinks a very good question would be how often people visit the Senior Center.

Melodie Perretto referred back to the brochures being put online and she asked who would be doing that. She then mentioned that she had spoken to John Francis who takes care of their computers. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that is out of their purview. Denise Sanderson said there is an IT Department in Town. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that the brochures will be

for the whole Town and not just for the senior community. Councilor Frank Szeps then mentioned that he had been unaware about the *Rocky Hill Pivotal Press* up until this evening's meeting. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Councilor Frank Szeps that they were talking about the Town brochure and he asked what Town brochure. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this is the Parks and Recreation Department brochure. Councilor Frank Szeps asked why there wouldn't just be the Parks and Recreation Department brochure and not a separate one. Denise Sanderson said the brochure comes out quarterly and the senior newsletter comes out monthly. They get the senior newsletter printed up for free.

Councilor Frank Szeps mentioned again how he likes the question about how often people visit the Senior Center because he said that is very important. He guesses that they would be interested in knowing why people wouldn't be visiting it. Toni Palazzolo said they could ask in the survey why people visit the Senior Center or why they don't because that would give them a feeling as to why they come to it or why they don't. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that would be on the same side with regards to what is wrong with the Senior Center. Councilor Frank Szeps said maybe they could take this off of the survey and just have people comment on their choice as to whether they come, etc. Denise Sanderson asked if this wouldn't be saying the same thing as the details of why people visit the Senior Center or why they never visit. Marilyn Swepson mentioned the details of people's visit, as to why they do or don't visit. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they could put a question mark next to this. Councilor Frank Szeps said the more they were saying this that it makes sense to him with regards to the details of people's visits.

Councilor Frank Szeps then referred to the question about whether seniors utilize the Human Resources Services and he said this is a big one for him. He thinks this is important especially when they are talking about senior programs. Denise Sanderson said they have to cross "Resources" off because this should just state "Human Services".

Councilor Frank Szeps referred to the question under the Human Services' one and he suggested that they just omit that. He said that he changed the wording on the fourth question on this draft so it states "What activities would you financially support if they were available for you to attend?" Councilor Joe Kochanek asked Councilor Frank Szeps if he was going towards them charging for these activities to be attended. Councilor Frank Szeps thinks this will be the future of Town services. Denise Sanderson said there are fees. Councilor Frank Szeps thinks if they put the word "financially" in there that people will know that free programs aren't being run and they aren't looking to build another government bureaucracy. This will be an organization of seniors who want to participate and conduct whatever activities they would like to. Denise Sanderson asked Councilor Frank Szeps why he wanted to omit the question that was before this one and she asked him if thought it was redundant. Councilor Frank Szeps said he thought this went along with the second question. Denise Sanderson said okay. Barbara Josephs thinks "financially" will turn seniors off because some of them are just barely making it. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said based on what they had spoken about at this Committee's last meeting that when she was looking at this, there are four things on the bottom of this draft that Denise Sanderson had mentioned (recreational, educational, healthcare finance and socialization). Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said the bottom half of the survey isn't asking any questions but it is just putting a lot of words there. She thought a survey was going to come back to them with those four topics and questions underneath each of those. She mentioned that she wasn't really

getting any input from these questions as to whether people can really afford to pay for some of these events or if there are people who are interested in needing Human Services or more tax information. She referred to the top couple of questions on the draft and she said that they are getting this from asking those questions. She thinks they have to go with the four topics and they have to put one or two questions underneath each of them so that they will get a full view of the senior community of Rocky Hill. She then said that they never asked if anyone is interested in expanding the program of the seniors working in the Town. She said that Superintendent Dr. Mark Zito had said that there are twenty or twenty-five seniors who work in the schools and she asked if people would be interested in working for the Town. She asked if people know about the two tax relief programs for the seniors. She is trying to reach out to a lot more than the two hundred seniors who come to the Community Center. She mentioned that this is where she is at and she wanted to discuss this. She and Denise Sanderson had been going back and forth today with a couple of e-mails on this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she wanted to throw this out to see what people thought about it.

Councilor Frank Szeps then referred to what is stated in the draft with regards to “the following activities are currently available...” and he said that he would change this to state that “the following activities are currently supported...”. He then suggested just omitting what is under the socialization one because the goal of the survey is for them to get a grasp on the knowledge that the residents have about the senior programs. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas thinks that socialization is important because she said that there are people out there who maybe need that. She explained some more. Denise Sanderson said they could maybe change the wording so that people can think of the Senior Center as not being just for education, recreation or finance but also for socialization. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that is where the lunches come in. Councilor Frank Szeps thinks the socialization part is the general nature of the program itself. This would be his goal if he was to elect to come to the program and he gave an example of how he wouldn’t be going to a senior program to see if he could improve his bingo game for example. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Joe Kochanek if he had any thoughts on that and he said he did but he said that Councilor Frank Szeps still had the floor at that point. Councilor Frank Szeps said this isn’t like they are going to be hiding socialization but he said when they look at socialization that it states “plans for the future in a larger facility”. He said they then get into a designated room for miscellaneous activities and for dining space. He told them that they are putting out an advertisement basically for a larger facility but he doesn’t think this is in the aspect for socialization. The senior program is about socializing. Melodie Perretto referred back to where socialization is stating “designated room for dining”. She said they have a lunchroom but this is more than that because bingo, etc. is played there. She explained that a dining area should be used just for eating. That is why they have “designated room for dining” where they can drink coffee and eat snacks, etc. She explained some more. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that isn’t currently supported and she said that this is a plan for the future. She said that Number 1., Number 2., and Number 3. that are listed on the draft are things that they are currently doing. She mentioned that they do Number 3. but they don’t have a separate room for dining. Denise Sanderson asked about if they changed the whole paragraph to show what they are supported by right now for the socialization. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said for this to be made current. Denise Sanderson said okay and she told Chairwoman Cathy Vargas that she understood where she is coming from. Councilor Frank Szeps said in his opinion that one statement would cover this. This would be that the goal of the senior program is for socialization.

Councilor Joe Kochanek told Councilor Frank Szeps that the last thing he said makes a lot of sense with regards to socialization for them to just say that the goal of the organization is for them to socialize. Councilor Joe Kochanek referred to some of the other things that Councilor Frank Szeps had said and he said that he would have to agree with Barbara Josephs. Councilor Joe Kochanek said the seniors pay for certain things right now. He then told Councilor Frank Szeps that he knew what he was saying with regards to “financially” and that was that they are going to start having more things being paid by the people who utilize them but he said on the other hand that there are a lot of people who can’t afford to pay more than what they are paying now. Councilor Joe Kochanek told Councilor Frank Szeps that that is a discussion they have had a million times. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked what the purpose of this survey is. He told them if all they are doing is asking some questions and kind of selling themselves to the people who will be receiving the survey that he doesn’t think the purpose of the survey is to let people know what they are doing. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said no. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they are trying to figure out what the seniors are doing and what they want to do, as well as what they don’t want to do. He went back to what he had said about what it is that is making the seniors happy or unhappy. This is what the survey is for basically. If they want to see this thing, they have the pivot point but that is another subject. They want to know in this survey, if they are doing things right or what it is that they need to do to make it right. He liked Bristol’s survey because it was in-depth with “yes” and “no”, etc. boxes that could be checked. There was also some narrative in that. He explained more about that. He didn’t think that Rocky Hill’s survey was trying to sell what they do today. He wants to know what is in people’s heads. They are trying to make the Senior Center more effective to the seniors and they want to find out what the future needs are going to be for the seniors. They know what they are now but they need to know what they need to do to make this better five years from now or for right now. He said this is his opinion.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas wants to know why they only have two hundred seniors at the Senior Center. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that is his point. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if the seniors know that there are all of these programs. People might not be showing up because they aren’t into the socialization seeing they are very shy. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked Denise Sanderson if that happens. Denise Sanderson referred to the exercise programs and said that people do their exercising then they leave. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked why they don’t participate in anything else. Denise Sanderson said they don’t because they aren’t seniors in their minds and they think they will become seniors if they hang out at the Senior Center. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that is an issue. Denise Sanderson agreed and she said it doesn’t mean someone is old just because this is called a Senior Center. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked Denise Sanderson, in her opinion, if there are needs that she thinks are out there that they haven’t addressed. Denise Sanderson said housing is a big thing. Councilor Joe Kochanek agreed but he said they can’t help with that. Denise Sanderson then mentioned about them getting the stigma off. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that is an issue and they will always have two hundred people or less than that at the Senior Center if they don’t fix that. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked as Councilors, how they would approach the Town Council about getting a bigger facility if they only have two hundred people there. She said that she can’t go to the Town Council to ask that. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they know though that there are a thousand seniors out there who could come to the Senior Center if they have the right mixture of things. Denise Sanderson said they have a membership list of fifteen hundred seniors. Councilor Joe Kochanek said he wants

to know what it is that he can do better and he explained that this is like a business they are running. They have to close the door if they have no customers. He told Denise Sanderson that they have to figure out what the customers want and need, as well as how they would provide this for them. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that he sees a lot of people wandering around who would be more than happy to spend more time socializing and getting into activities but he doesn't know what those are. He explained again that they need to have customers in order to run a business and this is a business that is being run. They have to know what customers want or dislike in order for them to have them. He told everyone that he is sorry if the "dislike" part is bothering any of them but he said they have to know what is turning people off. He explained more and said this isn't going to be done with this draft they have of the survey because that is just telling the seniors what they do and asking them how often they come to the Senior Center, etc. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas referred to the bottom of the draft again. She said those are just words and then she mentioned about putting some questions in with regards to those different things. She mentioned about the average person who will be receiving this and if they know that they have all of this available, as well as if they would use it knowing that they have it. Councilor Joe Kochanek said it basically is about if there is a market for these things. He mentioned how woodworking had been a big issue one year. He gave more details and said how that program must have changed because they got a lot more participation in it. That is a success and he told them that they have to make more successes. He referred to whatever had been done with the woodworking and he said that a lot of the other things can be turned around so that more people are pulled into the Senior Center to give them the benefit of the programs that are being offered. They have to market this. He asked what had been done with woodworking and Denise Sanderson explained. Councilor Joe Kochanek referred to how Chairwoman Cathy Vargas had mentioned the specific items on the bottom of the draft of the survey. Councilor Joe Kochanek referred to participation levels and he asked if those can be improved or changed. He asked if there is a real financial advisor who comes in once a month to talk to people. These are the kinds of things that people want to know. Denise Sanderson said this is a "Catch 22" to get all of the different types of programs in there. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they can work on this one program at a time. Denise Sanderson said that she understands this. She gave an example of Wii bowling and how that has to be broken down so that somebody else can be brought in.

Councilor Frank Szeps said they were running out of time. He told Denise Sanderson that he likes the survey and he thinks they did a great job on it. Councilor Frank Szeps asked if he could get a couple of his suggestions in that. He thinks that they can go with this and it is a beginning. He told Councilor Joe Kochanek that he completely disagreed with him because this is a club they have going here and not a business. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they have to sell the membership though. Councilor Frank Szeps said if people don't want to participate that they shouldn't look at this as them losing them because it is people's choices as to whether they want to belong to this particular program or not, etc. Councilor Joe Kochanek said if a program isn't structured where there is an appeal to it then it is their job to fix it. The same thing was done with woodworking. They should see if there are other items on the list that are being attended minimally and then they should see if they can change those around to do them the correct way to get a lot more participation.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she is very interested in the services being offered by the Town and she isn't just looking at the programs being offered. She wants to make sure that everyone is

aware of these services. She doesn't want someone out there who is struggling and isn't aware that there are things that they could be currently receiving from the Town. This concerns her. Councilor Joe Kochanek said right. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told the Councilors that she didn't know what they thought but she thought the top part of this survey is okay if they tweaked it. She mentioned to them about just taking the bottom of this survey and adding a couple of "yes" or "no" questions, especially in the services area because she really wants to get a handle on that. She explained that someone might not want to come out to do Wii bowling but they might desperately need to get to a Doctor's appointment if they are by themselves. Councilor Frank Szeps said that is a different situation and he thinks a good job will be done by the survey asking about how often Human Services is utilized. This will give them that information. He said that they quickly revert back to the fact that they have this organization because they have seniors out there who require these additional services. He thinks they are crossing the line. He explained that this "should not be the crutch" for these types of programs. He likes the survey and he could go with this as the first run to see what they get back, except for a couple of comments that he made on it. Councilor Joe Kochanek said that sounded fair and he said for this to be sent out with a couple of changes they have, for them to see what this buys them.

Toni Palazzolo asked how this survey will get to the people. She said they can't go into apartments. She mentioned that she was one of the ones who had canvased what Governor Malloy had put on West Street. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they had talked about churches, the Cora J. Belden Library and including this with the fall brochure that goes out. There is also the potential of getting this in the *Rare Reminder* as well, etc.

At this point, Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to adjourn. He said that they were cutting into his time (for the Open Space Land Acquisition & Farmland Preservation Subcommittee meeting) and he told them to "get out". Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked for what Councilor Frank Szeps just said to be put into these Working Notes. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that she hadn't called for a motion to adjourn. Councilor Frank Szeps said it was after 5:30 p.m. and he said that he had an Executive Session. He said that he didn't mean to rush them but they were on his time now.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked the seniors if they could make the tweaks to the survey and then get it to Denise Sanderson. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas then said this could be e-mailed to this Committee's members and they could have one final look at this. She thanked everyone very much and she told them that they did a great job.

5. OTHER

There was no other business to discuss.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked for a motion to adjourn.

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:34 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary
(Not present at meeting.)